

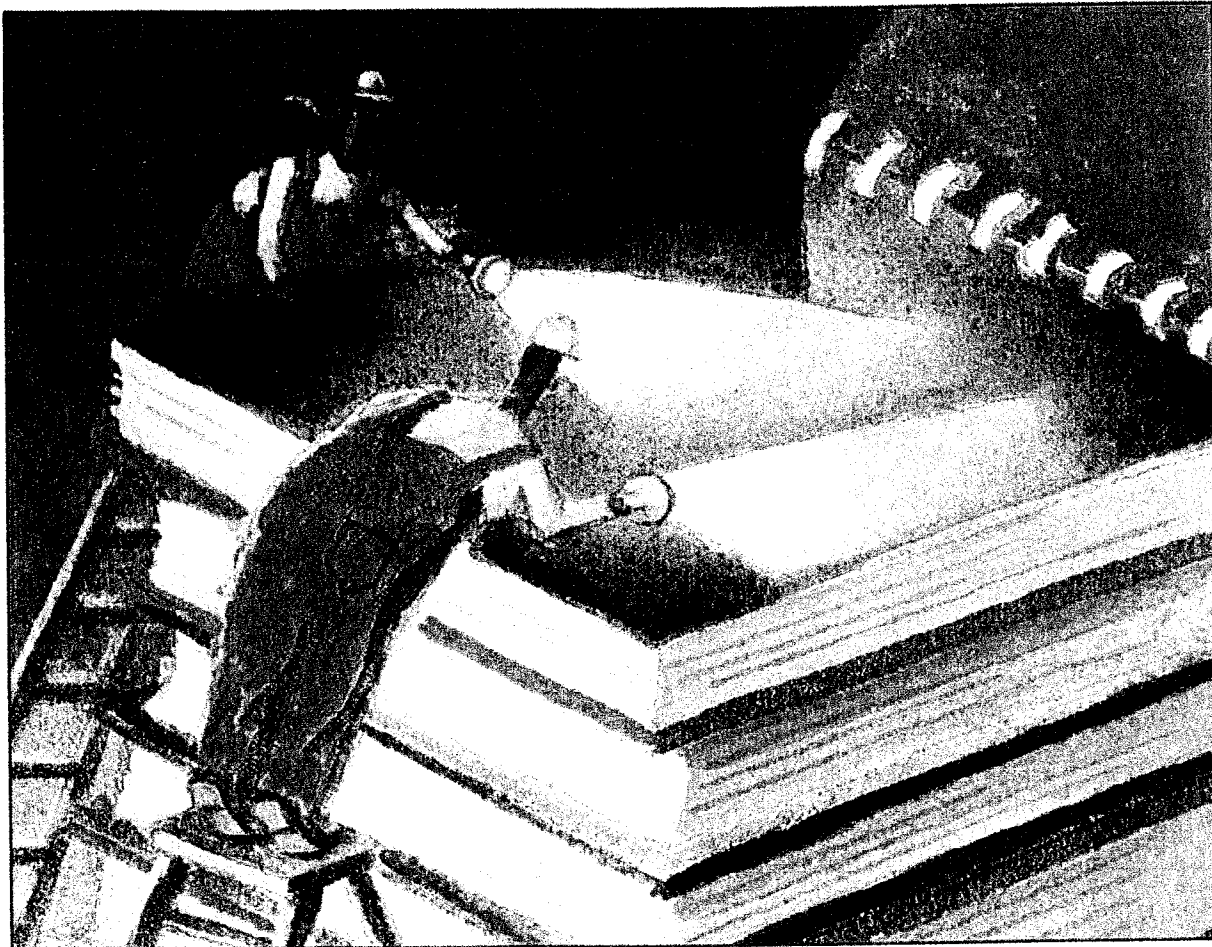
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The "Faculty Bias" Studies:

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# SCIENCE *or* PROPAGANDA?

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BY JOHN LEE

JBL Associates

## About the Author

JOHN B. LEE, Ed.D., is founder and president of JBL Associates. Lee has extensive experience working with federal postsecondary education issues. Before founding JBL Associates in 1983, he taught psychology at the college level, worked on Capitol Hill, and was employed by Stanford Research Institute and the Education Commission of the States. He has worked as a consultant in Washington, D.C., for the last 25 years, handling projects for associations, states, institutions and federal agencies.

JBL Associates specializes in postsecondary education policy research and analysis. The firm helps clients develop and evaluate postsecondary education policies and practices through the application of qualitative and quantitative analytic techniques. Clients include postsecondary institutions, state and national government agencies, and private associations and organizations. Recent clients include the U.S. Department of Education, The Lumina Foundation, American Council on Education, and Education Commission of the States. JBL's core capabilities include detailed knowledge of federal policy, institutional finance, student aid policy, state governance issues, faculty salaries, and higher education staffing issues.

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# Executive Summary

**SEVERAL RESEARCH PUBLICATIONS** have presented evidence purporting to show that higher education in the United States displays a systematic liberal bent. This, in the opinion of critics, marginalizes conservative voices on the faculty and results in political views being presented in the classroom and a research agenda that is shaped by liberal priorities. These critics also suggest that students with conservative views are at a minimum uncomfortable in this environment and at worst may be punished with lower grades. This report examines eight studies dealing with these issues.

The results of these eight studies, which have begun to appear in newspaper columns and on talk shows, are being presented as fact. Often, versions of this research appear on FrontPagemag.com, a Web site sponsored by David Horowitz, who has been instrumental in introducing the so-called Academic Bill of Rights.

We analyze these studies on one basis only: to determine if they meet minimum research standards that would allow a reader to accept the results.

The studies were evaluated using five research principles that help to establish whether the authors are overgeneralizing based on limited or flawed collection and interpretation of data. These principles help to differentiate anecdotal evidence that is handpicked to support a particular point of view and systematic observation that leads to valid conclusions.

The five research principles are:

1. Can another researcher with a different perspective *replicate* the results using the information provided by the author?
2. Are the *definitions* of important terms clear enough that someone else could recognize the event or condition in other contexts?
3. Does the research *eliminate alternative explanations* for the results?
4. Do the *conclusions follow logically* from the evidence?
5. Has the author guarded against conditions that could introduce systematic *bias* in the results?

Our analysis finds that:

- None of the eight reports meets all of the minimum research standards for a valid research study.
- Three of the reports meet none of the minimum research standards.
- Only three of the reports meet at least two of the minimum research standards.

The authors of the reports have taken on a very ambitious topic—to determine how or whether the personal, social and political values of college faculty members are reflected in their professional work on campus. Unfortunately, the authors' methods are not well suited to the question they are trying to answer. The most significant flaw is the weakness of the link between the empirical results and their conclusions.

Taken together, these studies at best are able to suggest that college faculty members are probably more likely to be Democrats than Republicans. Even this conclusion has to be questioned because major groups of the higher education community are not included in the samples. No community college teachers, or even faculty in less prestigious institutions, are included in any of the samples. We know nothing about part-time faculty, who were apparently not included. Given the low response rate, inadequate sampling and missing responses, it is not possible with any precision to calculate a ratio of Democrats to Republicans at the sampled institutions, much less imply what might be the case in institutions outside the sampling frame. Because of the flaws in the sample and response rates, we cannot be confident about the findings.

Among the more serious claims the authors make is that this liberal dominance results in systematic exclusion of conservative ideas, limited promotion opportunities for conservative faculty, and expression in the classroom of liberal perspectives that damage student learning. These claims, however, are not supported by the research. Basic methodological flaws keep a critical reader from accepting the conclusions suggested by the authors.

The most characteristic error is suggesting "causality" when there is only "correlation." All of the reports use description, but some of them suggest that the political preferences of the faculty cause other things to happen. Several of the authors speculate about the implications of their research; in most of these cases, the speculation appears to be based on an expression of their perspective and not as an inevitable result of their research.

Several of the reports do not provide enough information about the methodology to allow someone who doubted the results to replicate the study. Replication is important to assure skeptics of the legitimacy of the results. The authors generally do not consider alternative explanations for their findings, and also do not control for factors that could introduce unintentional bias into the findings.

Each of the reviewed studies realizes imperfection in its own way. This report details these individual failures. Some of the publications are better than others when judged as research, but none gives readers the confidence in the conclusions that a well-designed study should provide.

Until studies are conducted that provide a more grounded and systematic approach to understanding the subtle relationship between political beliefs and professional academic responsibilities, it is irresponsible to suggest that the conclusions reached in these reports represent a scientifically derived set of facts. They do not. Passing off personal opinions as facts is not science; it is the antithesis of what serious researchers try to do, regardless of whether they are conservative or liberal.

## Studies Analyzed in the Full Report

1. American Council of Trustees and Alumni. (2006). *How Many Ward Churchills?* Washington, D.C.
2. American Council of Trustees and Alumni. (2005). *Intellectual Diversity: Time for Action.* Washington, D.C.
3. Klein, D. B., & Western, A. (forthcoming). "How Many Democrats per Republican at UC-Berkeley and Stanford? Voter Registration Data Across 23 Academic Departments." *Academic Questions*.
4. Rothman, S., Lichter, S. R. & Nevitte, N. (2005). "Politics and Professional Advancement Among College Faculty." *The Forum*, 3(1), 1-16.
5. Klein, D. B., & Stern, C. (forthcoming). "How Politically Diverse Are the Social Sciences and Humanities? Survey Evidence from Six Fields." *Academic Questions*.
6. Horowitz, D., & Lehrer, E. (2003). *Political Bias in the Administrations and Faculties of 32 Elite Colleges and Universities*. Los Angeles, Calif.: A report of the Center for the Study of Popular Culture.
7. Kelly-Woessner, A., & Woessner, M. (2006). "My Professor Is a Partisan Hack: How Professors' Political Views Affect Student Course Evaluation." *PS: Political Science & Politics*.
8. Balch, Stephen, H. *Words To Live By: How Diversity Trumps Freedom on Academic Websites*. National Association of Scholars, June 29, 2006.

# The “Faculty Bias” Studies: Science or Propaganda?

## **Purpose of the Study**

Several reports have presented research purporting to show that higher education in the United States displays a systematic liberal bent. This, in the opinion of critics, marginalizes conservative voices on the faculty. Further claims are made that these liberal faculty members present their political views in the classroom. These critics also suggest that students with conservative views are at a minimum uncomfortable in this environment and at worst may be punished with lower grades.

We analyze several studies that claim to support these conclusions to determine if they meet minimum research standards that would allow a reader to accept them. These research principles help to establish whether the studies’ authors are overgeneralizing based on limited or flawed collection and interpretation of data. Essentially, we suggest principles that can be used to differentiate handpicked anecdotal evidence to support a particular point of view and systematic observation that leads to valid conclusions.

## **Methods Used To Evaluate Research**

A 2006 publication of the U.S. Office of Management and Budget provides a clear definition of objectivity in research.

Objectivity refers to whether information is accurate, reliable, and unbiased, and is presented in an accurate, clear, and unbiased manner. It involves both the content of the information and the presentation of the information. This includes complete, accurate, and easily understood documentation of the source of the information, with a description of the sources of any errors that may affect the quality of the data, when appropriate. Objectivity is achieved by using reliable information sources and appropriate techniques to prepare information products.

### *Research Principle One: Allowing for Replication*

The first requirement in ensuring objectivity is making sure others can replicate the study. To enable other researchers to replicate a study, an author needs to do several things. Replication requires the author to describe the data collection and analysis procedures clearly enough so that it is possible to duplicate them. In addition, the author should share the collected data so that other analysts can check statistical procedures and results. Replication provides

confidence that the research was done correctly. If the author of a given study appears to have used selective data or sought out specific events in order to confirm his or her biases, while ignoring evidence that does not support them, then the study could be considered flawed.

The federal Data Quality Act (Section 515 of the Treasury and General Government Appropriations Act of 2001 [PL 106-544, H.R. 5658]) establishes replication as one of the key criteria for determining whether a study meets the high standards we should require in using science to support public policy.

*Research Principle Two: Establishing Clear Definitions*

Second, the researcher must define terms operationally (Tuckman, 1978). Terms such as "liberal" or "conservative" need to be carefully explained so that anyone who repeats the study can match the classification. One may disagree with the definition but still can use the classifications to sort individuals the same way or use different definitions to see if the results change.

*Research Principle Three: Accounting for Alternative Explanations*

Third, the study must be designed in such a way that only one explanation for the results can be accepted. This is the most rigorous of the requirements. If the evidence does not allow us to reject an alternative hypothesis, the research needs to be refined. This rule discounts the value of evidence that does not preclude alternative explanations. Several of the studies under review suffer from this problem.

*Research Principle Four: Drawing Logical Conclusions*

Fourth, the logic underlying the interpretation of results needs to be appropriate. A typical error is implying causality when the evidence merely shows association. Most of the reviewed studies are either descriptive or use correlation to show relationship. None of them proves that one event causes another. In the most deficient reports, no relationship exists between the observations and the suggested conclusions and implications. (See the section on the scientific method by Lynn Fancher on the American Scientific Affiliation Web site [[www.asa3.org/ASA/education/areas.htm](http://www.asa3.org/ASA/education/areas.htm)].)

*Research Principle Five: Eliminating Bias*

Fifth, it is necessary to eliminate the possibility of bias. Systematic observation guards against intended or unintended bias that could bring the results into disrepute (Calhoun, 2002). The care an author has taken to limit bias is an important measure of the quality of research. Bias can creep into results if cases are not selected randomly. Ideally, all individuals in the group to be studied have an equal chance to be included in the sample. If the study suggests the results apply to all faculty members, then all faculty members should have an equal chance to be included in the sample. The greater the gap between this ideal and the data collected, the less confidence we have in the results.

Bias can be introduced because very few people selected to be in a study may respond to the questionnaire. Those who do not respond may differ in some consistent way from those who do. For example, students who feel that faculty members have been unfair to them because of their political beliefs may be more prone to respond to a questionnaire on the subject than are



students who do not feel they have had a negative experience. To guard against response bias, researchers suggest a minimum response rate of 70 percent. This is a simple rule of thumb that does not always apply to specific cases, but for the studies reviewed here, it is appropriate. If the response rate is less than 70 percent, then some steps must be taken to determine if the nonrespondents differ systematically from those who did respond.

A related rule is that a study should have at least 30 cases from which to generalize to the larger population. The fewer the number of cases in a survey or category from which the author generalizes, the greater the chance of sampling error. This means that as the sample size shrinks, the chances increase of drawing incorrect conclusions about the characteristics of the larger group (for a good overview of these concepts, see Earl Babbie, *Survey Research Methods*, 2nd Edition, 1990).

To the degree that a study does not meet these standards, we must discount its validity and take it as a selective and biased view with limited value. Such studies may support an opinion but do not provide unequivocal evidence. The following summary of the five points provides the framework that we use to evaluate the studies.

1. Can another researcher with a different perspective *replicate* the results using the information provided by the author?
2. Are the *definitions* of important terms clear enough that someone else could recognize the event or condition in other contexts?
3. Does the research *eliminate alternative explanations* for the results?
4. Do the *conclusions follow logically* from the evidence?
5. Has the author guarded against conditions that could introduce systematic *bias* in the results?

Several pieces of research have shaped the debate about the political dispositions of college and university faculty. The reviewed studies vary in sophistication and methods, but each fails to meet at least one of the standards that are used to evaluate research. Taken together, it is not possible to use the results to support the generalizations the authors make. Each report is reviewed in turn, followed by a general conclusion about its cumulative value and suggestions for further research. Please see the next page for a chart summarizing the reviewed studies and noting whether they meet the criteria listed in the five research principles.

THE FIVE RESEARCH PRINCIPLES						
Study	Research method	Replication	Definitions	Alternative explanations	Logical conclusions	Control for bias
How Many Ward Churchills?	Review of course descriptions	Cannot replicate	Not available	Not eliminated	Do not follow	None
Intellectual Diversity: Time for Action	Survey of students	Instrument not available	Poorly worded items are ambiguous	Does not preclude alternative explanations	Conclusions not supported by research	Sample procedures not provided
How Many Democrats per Republican at UC-Berkeley and Stanford? Voter Registration Data Across 23 Academic Departments	Collection of voter registration data	Could replicate	Procedures used are clear	Ambiguity of data does not provide confidence in results	Conclusions are not supported by research	Too much possibility for error
Politics and Professional Advancement Among College Faculty	Survey of faculty	Not enough information to allow replication	Poorly considered definitions	Ambiguous results do not preclude alternative explanations	Conclusions do not follow from research	Not clear how sample was selected
How Politically Diverse are the Social Sciences and Humanities? Survey Evidence from Six Fields	Survey of faculty	Copy of data instrument not included	Not all concepts are defined clearly	Does not preclude alternative explanations	Conclusions do not follow from research	Low response rate
Political Bias in the Administrations and Faculties of 32 Elite Colleges and Universities	Collection of political registration data	Could replicate	Procedures used are clear	Ambiguity of data does not provide confidence in results	Conclusions do not follow from research	Too much possibility for error
My Professor is a Partisan Hack: How Professors' Political Views Affect Student Course Evaluation	Faculty-elicited student surveys	Could replicate	Most definitions are clear	Does not preclude alternative explanations	Conclusions do not follow from research	Low response rate of faculty
Words to Live By: How Diversity Trumps Freedom on Academic Websites	Content analysis	Could replicate	Muddled definitions	Does not preclude alternative explanations	Research is inadequate to support conclusions	No consideration for alternative meaning due to context or miscounting

# Review of Key Studies on the Politics of the Faculty

**STUDY 1:** American Council of Trustees and Alumni. (2006). *How Many Ward Churchills?* Washington, D.C.

## Summary

This report criticizes universities for allowing the curriculum to be politicized. The authors provide examples of courses they say appear to be indoctrinating students into an ideological slant. The case is built by a review of classes that the authors purport indicate a liberal bias. They indicate that the survey is not intended to be scientific, but rather to provide a representative sample of course offerings in the elite universities. They do not indicate how the survey is representative or how the courses were selected.

They claim that the course descriptions show how “narrow, single-minded and tendentious much of American higher education has become.” They suggest that the courses indicate a partisan orientation. More important, the authors indicate that “[i]t matters far less who teaches them than that they are being taught so frequently, by so very many people, in so many fields, at so very many schools.” This conclusion suggests a far more ambitious undertaking than was in fact attempted. The report provided 65 examples of courses at 48 colleges and universities.

## Methodology

There is no explanation of how the authors chose the courses to review. The full course description for each example is included in the appendix. They did pick the top 12 private universities as rated by *U.S. News & World Report*, the top 13 liberal arts colleges from the same source, and the schools of the Big 10 and the Big 12. This is not a representative sample of American higher education, but at least the list of institutions is included.

The classification system for determining how the courses were selected and evaluated is not explained. It appears that a class was included if it had one of the following terms in the description:

- Activism
- Animals and society (seen as PETA apologists)
- Bilingual education
- Discrimination
- Domestic violence
- Egalitarian
- Environmental justice
- Gay issues
- Gender politics
- Hate and evil
- Marxism
- Multiracial
- Oppression
- Pornography
- Queer theory
- Racism
- Radical
- Service projects (apparently code for getting students involved in left-wing causes)
- Social justice
- White studies
- Women's studies

### **Conclusions**

The study ends with the authors suggesting that there is an institutionalization of liberal agendas. The discussion goes far beyond anything introduced in their research and represents a general statement of their concerns and policy goals, as well as their definition of academic freedom. They admit that they do not know how to address the problem of ensuring fairness and objectivity in higher education, but they think the issue needs to be addressed.

### **Evaluation**

This study does not meet any of the five principles that we suggest using to evaluate objective research.

*Study replication*—The authors do not provide enough information about their methods to allow someone else to replicate the study.

*Clear and specific definitions*—The authors do not provide clear definitions of the rules they are using to define ideological slant. Doing a systematic analysis of the political bias of college courses would be a daunting effort, primarily because of the slippery nature of the definition of political bias as it might be expressed in different classes. The authors have made no attempt to provide an operational definition of the concept such that a neutral observer could make the distinction.

*Ruling out alternatives*—The research is so poorly designed that it is not possible to decide if the phenomena the authors are trying to describe do or do not exist. Using descriptions of some courses by some teachers in some colleges allows the authors to select the evidence that supports a specific conclusion without consideration for any alternatives. Their sampling procedure automatically introduces bias. The authors have not presented any information that would allow a neutral reader to reject or accept the proposition that American colleges and universities provide students with a range of options in the content and perspective of classes. To select 65 courses at 48 colleges and

universities and use them to make a particular case, without examining the full range of courses offered, does not portray the curriculum available to college students, and certainly does not allow for the sweeping generalizations the authors make.

*Relationship between evidence and conclusions*—The fact that the authors have not observed the classes, but rather only reviewed the course outlines of a few teachers in a limited number of institutions, does not support their larger claims about the extensive nature of politically influenced classes. Simply reviewing a few course descriptions does not provide much insight into how the teacher presents the material or how fair the course is in practice. The authors overreach their evidence when they claim that, "...in both traditional disciplines and new-fangled programs, the classes offered and the faculty members who teach them are displaying an ideological slant that is frequently as uniform as it is severe." The authors go on to take the position that all Americans "...should be outraged by the one sided, doctrinaire perspective that, too often, today defines the college experience." Nothing in the material they report supports these conclusions. They made no effort to systematically sample class offerings or limit their concern to the required general education classes that they argue exemplify the biggest problem. These conclusions represent statements of the authors' opinions, which their research does not support.

*Eliminating bias*—Their sampling procedure was not random nor does it provide any evidence of the percent of courses that meet their criteria for being ideologically biased.

**STUDY 2:** American Council of Trustees and Alumni. (2005). *Intellectual Diversity: Time for Action*. Washington, D.C.

### **Summary**

The American Council of Trustees and Alumni sponsored a survey of students at the top 50 colleges and universities (as listed in *U.S. News & World Report*) to determine the extent to which faculty members include their personal political agendas in their classes. Of the institutions included, only four were public; the rest were private.

Most of the report is a review of what ACTA believes should be done to solve the problem of political bias in the classroom.

### **Methodology**

A total of 658 students responded to the survey in October and November 2004, a presidential election year. Students were asked to respond to a series of items on a five-point scale from "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree," with "don't know" as one option. The authors did not present all the results from the survey nor did they provide an explanation for the exclusion of the remaining items.

## Conclusions

The authors draw three major conclusions. First, they say it is clear that today's college faculties are overwhelmingly one-sided in their political and ideological views. Second, they believe this lack of ideological diversity is undermining both the education of students and the free exchange of ideas central to the mission of the university. Third, they say that it is urgent that universities effectively address the challenge of intellectual diversity.

## Evaluation

The way in which the authors present their results reduces clarity and distorts the results. They claim that 49 percent of students say some professors frequently injected political comments into their courses. Looking at the breakdown of this item shows that 14 percent strongly agree and 35 percent somewhat agree, while 24 percent strongly disagree and 26 percent somewhat disagree. By combining the "strongly agree" with the "somewhat agree" responses, the authors lose gradations of meaning. This combining of responses was used throughout their text, but the full results were presented in the tables.

*Study replication*—The authors claim this is a scientific survey, but they tell us nothing of how the survey was conducted, how students were chosen or what the response rate was. This lack of information about methods suggests that the study may not tell us very much about students' perceptions of political bias among faculty members.

*Clear and specific definitions*—The authors use language that is not usually seen in a scientific survey. Examples include "disheartening response," "the answer was deeply disturbing," and "a shocking 49 percent." Emotional language is generally not part of the systematic presentation of survey results. Such language represents the authors' response to the results. Science is not an investigation of good or bad or moral or immoral; it is a way of providing a plausible case based on evidence, and should be presented as such.

*Ruling out alternatives*—The phrasing of the items and the response options reduce the accuracy of the results. Students were asked if *some* professors did this or if it happened in *some* classes. The authors do not consider this adjective in their conclusions where they leave out the "some" and say things like ... "a shocking 49 percent of students say that their professors frequently injected political comments into their courses." A more precise statement would be, "14 percent of the students strongly agreed with the statement that *some* professors frequently comment on politics in class, and another 35 percent agreed somewhat." The phrasing in the report introduces ambiguity and implies that all the professors in the student's experience act this way. It may be that students had one or two teachers during their college careers who they felt were biased. This phrasing limits what we know about the extent of the reported bias. We certainly cannot assume it to mean all or most teachers.

As an example, the authors say that 48 percent of the students reported that some campus panels and lecture series on political issues seemed totally one-sided. It is

important to note the wording of this item, which says, "On my campus, some panel discussions and presentations on political issues seem totally one-sided." It may well be that during a campaign year, when this survey was done, candidates for public office made presentations on campus at the invitation of the Young Democrats or Young Republicans. We should not be surprised that these presentations might have been one-sided.

The results combine the responses of "strongly agree" and "somewhat agree." Disaggregating these results might provide a different interpretation—that few students have a strong agreement with these statements of bias. In fact, the majority of students believe that evidence of political bias on campus does not exist.

The study would be strengthened by including a control group of teachers who were purposefully politically neutral in their presentation. Having students indicate whether they thought these teachers interjected politics into the classroom would provide a baseline to which we could compare the results of the other group. By having a control group, we would have a better basis to determine whether the students' judgment of their teachers differed significantly from the control group. It may be that some students would perceive a political bias in a class, even if it were politically neutral. We do not know this, so it is not possible to be certain if the results of this study are meaningful or not.

*Relationship between evidence and conclusions*—The weakness of the research precludes generalizing about the results. It is not appropriate to conclude that the lack of intellectual diversity is undermining the education of students. Nothing in the authors research suggests that education is being undermined, whatever that means. This is a classic example of claiming implications that go far beyond the actual data.

*Eliminating bias*—The sampling procedure is only partially described. We know that the researchers picked the top 50 colleges and universities from the *U.S. News & World Report* rankings. This universe includes only four public institutions, which leaves out the institutions that most students attend. We do not know how the students were selected or what the response rate was. It is not possible to determine what the sampling error was with the information they have provided. We do not even know if the respondents were undergraduates or graduates. All of these omissions open the possibility that bias has been introduced. It is not possible to check for this from the information provided by the authors.

The authors present their results by saying, "Given the results of this scientific survey, one simply cannot claim any longer that faculty members are not importing politics in the classroom in a way that affects students' ability to learn." However, the fact that the authors did not follow standards that guide quality research undermines their description of it as scientific.

**STUDY 3:** Klein, D. B., & Western, A. (forthcoming). "How Many Democrats per Republican at UC-Berkeley and Stanford? Voter Registration Data Across 23 Academic Departments." *Academic Questions*.

### **Summary**

This study reviewed the voter registration of college professors at Stanford University and the University of California at Berkeley. The conclusion was that there was a preponderance of Democrats among the faculty as compared with Republicans.

### **Methodology**

The method used was to check faculty names from 23 academic departments against voter registration lists in the home county of the university and then in surrounding counties. If the name appeared as a Democrat or Republican on the voter registration files and if there was no duplicate name in the other party list, then the name was assigned to the appropriate political party. If the name appeared on both the Democratic and Republican lists, it was relegated to the indeterminate category. If the name was not found, the search for the name continued in contiguous counties until it was found. If the name never appeared on a voter file, it was put in the not found category. The researchers were able to categorize 1,005 of the 1,497 names on their list, for a 67 percent match rate. The remaining 492 names were not found.

### **Conclusions**

Klein and Western found a Democratic to Republican ratio of 9.9 to 1 at Berkeley and 7.6 to 1 at Stanford. The implicit but unproven logic of the authors' conclusion is that the political party registration of the faculty member is directly related to decisions made at the departmental level, where they claim Republicans are a marginalized minority.

### **Evaluation**

*Study replication/Clear and specific definitions*—This project is very clear about the method used, making it possible to replicate the study. The definition of terms and processes makes it possible to recognize the conditions the authors are describing.

*Ruling out alternatives*—The primary weakness of this approach is the potential confusion of names. If the faculty member's name was found in the home county, no further checks were made in neighboring counties. It does not appear that any attempt was made to confirm that the name on the voter registration list was the same person as the faculty member. The chance for confusion is obvious.

*Relationship between evidence and conclusions*—The claim that Republican faculty are marginalized in departmental decision-making is not based on evidence of how, or if, this happens. Nothing in the research describes how personal voting patterns are connected with academic decisions.



*Eliminating bias*—The use of only two institutions is justified on the basis that this study was an attempt to refine the data collection method and validate previous results.

The large share of missing cases further undermines the results. Only 53 percent of the cases at Stanford and 54 percent of the cases at Berkeley were identified as Republican or Democrat. The rest represented a combination of not found, indeterminate, non-partisan, or declined to state. A few (less than 3 percent) were registered in smaller parties. Nearly half the cases in the sample could not be classified as either Democrat or Republican. The authors do not include the missing cases in their analysis, and we do not know what bias these missing cases introduce into the results.

If the attempt was to demonstrate the usefulness of the study's methodology, it was not successful. The most obvious problem is the lack of a confirmation that the registered voters were the named faculty members, combined with the large number of unclassified cases.

**STUDY 4:** Rothman, S., Lichter, S. R. & Nevitte, N. (2005). "Politics and Professional Advancement Among College Faculty." *The Forum*, 3(1), 1-16.

### **Summary**

The study is based on a 1999 survey of full-time faculty in four-year institutions. This survey, the North American Academic Study Survey, was distributed to students, faculty and administrators in the United States and Canada. The survey asked about demographic background and attitudes toward political and academic issues, and requested a description of academic background, activities and accomplishments.

The study was designed to determine the relationship between the political orientation and views of faculty in four-year colleges and universities and the prestige of the institution in which they taught. The authors also wanted to examine whether these political orientations are self-reinforcing: Do faculty members who do not share the prevailing mindset find professional advancement more difficult?

### **Methodology**

A Canadian market research firm conducted the study. A total of 1,643 faculty members responded from a stratified sample of 183 institutions (81 doctoral, 59 comprehensive and 43 liberal arts). The authors claim a 72 percent response rate by full-time faculty members chosen randomly from the selected institutions. They report that only 1,562 cases were used in the statistical modeling. No cases from historically black colleges and universities were included.

The items that allow the authors to classify faculty members by political preference include information on publications, attendance at international meetings and time

spent on research. They correlated these achievements with measures of institutional quality where the individual taught. Classifying institutions into eight categories based on the *U.S. News & World Report* rankings (we assume that the 1998 edition of the rankings was used) developed the quality index.

The authors used a multivariate statistical model to determine "whether professional advancement is influenced by ideological orientation over and above the effects of scholastic achievement." The model tests the relationship of ideological orientation to the prestige of the institution where a faculty member teaches, while holding the professional experience factors constant. They tested the three measures of ideological orientation separately: self-rating as either left/liberal or right/conservative, the index of responses to six items showing agreement-disagreement on issues, and identification as a Republican or Democrat. In addition to the political variables, the authors included measures of religion, gender, sexual orientation and marital status that might influence where a faculty member teaches.

Two data sources were used to document a trend toward greater liberal presence on the faculty. The respondents could rate themselves on a scale from very right to very left. The authors recoded the results from their study to fit with the five response categories used in a 1984 Carnegie Foundation study. By comparing the results of these earlier studies to the results of the current study, the authors claimed evidence of a dramatic change in faculty political affiliations.

The results indicated that 72 percent of the faculty assigned themselves a left-liberal orientation and 15 percent indicated right-conservative, with the remainder in a neutral category. Looking at the actual party registration tells a different story. Half the respondents said they were Democrats and 11 percent indicated Republican, with the other 39 percent being Independent or "other party." The differences varied by academic field, ranging from a high of 88 percent liberal among faculty members in English literature to a low of 49 percent liberal for faculty members in business. Faculty members in the sample generally showed high agreement with positions usually classified as liberal. This result supported the authors' first assumption that the faculty is predominantly liberal in political orientation.

### **Conclusions**

As they expected, the authors found that measures of academic achievement, not political ideology, had the strongest positive relationship with the prestige of the institution where faculty members worked, while the score on party affiliation (Republican) and actively attending a Christian church (but not a Jewish synagogue) were negatively related to the quality of the institution where the faculty member taught. They also found that the index of social liberalism was significantly related to the prestige of the institution where the individual taught.

The authors take these results as confirmation of their second hypothesis that conservatives and Republicans teach at less prestigious institutions than liberals do when measures of academic achievement are taken into consideration. One of the

associated findings unrelated to their hypothesis was that women were less likely to teach in higher-quality institutions.

They conclude that faculty members have a liberal orientation and are likely to be Democrats. Second, they conclude that Republicans are more likely to teach in lower-quality schools than are Democrats or liberals. The authors suggest that their findings regarding discrimination against conservative faculty should be regarded as preliminary. They do not have a ready explanation for the associated finding that Christians who regularly attend religious services, as well as women, were also not as likely to teach in less-prestigious institutions. They suggest that their evidence supports conservative complaints about liberal homogeneity in academia, and that such complaints deserve to be taken seriously.

In their review of previous studies, the authors suggest that the dominance of liberals in higher education is increasing over time.

### **Evaluation**

*Study replication*—It is not possible to replicate the study. The authors do not provide a copy of the data collection instrument or the response categories, so it is not possible to evaluate the phrasing of the items. We find no evidence of other studies that used data from this source, so there has been no external review of the data instrument or distribution of responses.

*Clear and specific definitions*—Most terms were not clearly defined. Because the authors do not provide a copy of the data collection instrument, it is not always possible to determine how responses were converted into the categories used in the report.

*Ruling out alternatives*—This study makes the error of treating evidence of relationship as if it were causal. This study does not provide evidence that being conservative, being female or attending church causes one to teach at a lower-quality college. Nor does the study provide any evidence that being a political conservative hinders a faculty member's professional advancement. Multivariate models can show relationships between events, but they do not show cause or influence as the authors state. We cannot tell from correlation what caused what. Even if one accepts the correlation results, the statistical model explains only 20 percent of the variation in the prestige of the institution in which a faculty member teaches. The measures of political orientation add very little to the explanatory power of academic achievement. That means that factors other than those asked about in the survey predict the prestige of the institution where faculty members teach.

*Relationship between evidence and conclusions*—If a study were to address such causal questions, it would need to include much more information about the process of hiring or about advancement in the academic workplace. The authors understand this and suggest that the results should be treated as preliminary. They provide no evidence of systematic discrimination in the hiring or promotion of conservative scholars.

The evidence of a long-term shift to the left is problematic because the items were not the same in the historic data that were used for comparison. Even small differences in item structure and response options can change the way individuals respond, making direct comparisons questionable. In addition, the earlier data (collected as part of a Carnegie study) included community colleges, so the two samples are dissimilar (see Media Matters for America, 2005). Zipp and Fenwick (Public Opinion Quarterly Vol. 70, No. 3) argue that using better data leads to a different conclusion. They used the 1989 and 1997 National Surveys of Faculty done by the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching. They found that the faculty had become more moderate in their politics. They also indicate that younger faculty are more conservative than older faculty. They also report that faculty in more-elite institutions tended to be more liberal than those in less-elite institutions. Finally, the plurality of faculty members in community colleges was conservative. These results contradict the conclusions suggested by Rothman, Lichter and Nevitte.

Extensive rebuttals of this study have been published in *The Forum* (Ames et al., 2005) and Media Matters for America (2005). In addition to points already raised, these articles take issue with various technical aspects of the statistical model and definition of the variables. They conclude that, for both theoretical and methodological reasons, the deductions are inconclusive, misleading or false.

*Elimination of bias*—The sample may have been drawn appropriately, but the authors do not provide enough information to make us comfortable about their procedures. They do not tell us how many public and private institutions were selected. They report a 72 percent response rate of full-time faculty selected. Community college faculty and part-time faculty are not included. We do not know which list of faculty was used to select respondents.

In short, this study does not provide us with any evidence that political beliefs have anything to do with the professional advancement of college and university faculty. It may be that individuals with certain political beliefs tend to select certain occupations, such as college teaching or the military. This study does not preclude that explanation.

**STUDY 5:** Klein, D. B., & Stern, C. (forthcoming). "How Politically Diverse Are the Social Sciences and Humanities? Survey Evidence from Six Fields." *Academic Questions*.

### Summary

This study was based on a survey of six national social science and humanities professional associations, conducted in spring 2003. The authors asked faculty members in these associations to report their predominant voting preferences over the last 10 years. The goal was to improve the estimates of the Democratic to Republican political preferences that had been reported in other studies using other methods. The

associations were in the fields of anthropology, economics, history, legal philosophy, political science and sociology.

### **Methodology**

The authors received 1,678 completed questionnaires out of 5,486 sent—a 30.9 percent response rate. The study only included the 1,029 members who were academics and not retired. The authors understand the possible bias that this low response rate introduces, but suggest there is no reason to believe that any bias would affect how respondents report their political orientation.

Another version of this research was published in *Independent Review* (Vol. XI, No.1, Summer 2006, pp. 37-52). In this version, the authors limited the analysis to the responses of sociologists who were in the American Sociological Association (ASA). This study reported on 351 responses to 1,000 surveys sent randomly to the membership. The research results in this study were included as part of a larger analysis of public statements and actions by ASA. The authors conclude that the field demonstrates “excessive leftism.” According to the authors, this personal political predilection limits the intellectual perspectives and conceptual frameworks that sociologists use in their work. The authors do not evaluate the publications of sociologists to demonstrate this bias; they just assume it to exist.

### **Conclusions**

The authors found that 80 percent of the respondents indicated that they had voted predominantly for Democratic candidates over the previous 10 years. The results by academic field showed that the ratio of Democrats to Republicans was greatest in the anthropology and sociology departments (30 to one and 28 to one, respectively), with smaller, but still dominant, Democratic advantages in the other departments. Economics is at the bottom of the distribution with a three-to-one Democrat advantage.

One of the authors’ findings is that younger faculty members were more likely to be Democrats than those who were older. They suggest this points to increasing domination by Democrats. They also argue that the fact that non-academic members of these associations were more likely to be Republican than were academic members indicates Republicans have been selected out of academia. In their discussion, the authors argue that a “one-party campus is a problem irrespective of what one’s own views happen to be.” They go on to suggest strategies that they claim will nurture and protect a healthy degree of competition among intellectually diverse factions by protecting minority points of view. One example they put forward is the use of proportional voting, which would ensure a minority of being able to determine a fractional share of the outcomes. They argue that if the majority always rules in academic decisions, the minority perspective is totally negated.

### **Evaluation**

*Study replication*—The authors do not provide any evidence of how personal political views are translated into a single voice on the campus. Nor do they define the problem

very well. Experience would lead one to believe that classroom presentations about theory, facts and interpretation of texts are much more a function of the academic traditions in which faculty members have been grounded than of their personal political beliefs. If this is not true, the authors have given no guidance as to why the alternative would be the case.

*Clear and specific definitions*—The authors do not define “marginalization” in any way that would allow us to identify it if we saw it.

*Ruling out alternatives*—The authors claim that a higher proportion of Democrats among younger respondents “means that lopsidedness has become more extreme over the past decades.” An alternative explanation is that younger voters may be more liberal-leaning, and their political ideology could simply shift to the right with age.

*Relationship between evidence and conclusions*—This study presents a limited and flawed set of data that does not lead to the conclusions the authors indicate. The lack of definition of terms reduces the usefulness of this study.

*Elimination of bias*—The low response rate of the faculty members whom were surveyed introduces the possibility of bias. Even the claims for the magnitude of the Democratic advantage and the differential among departments are called into question by the low response rate.

The *Independent Review* article concludes that Republican sociologists are more likely to work outside of academia, based on the finding that 10 of their Republican respondents worked outside of academia, compared with eight who were in academia. It is not possible to generalize about the difference with so few cases.

**STUDY 6:** Horowitz, D., & Lehrer, E. (2003). *Political Bias in the Administrations and Faculties of 32 Elite Colleges and Universities*. Los Angeles, Calif.: A report of the Center for the Study of Popular Culture.

### **Summary and Methodology**

The authors present this study as a “report on political bias at 32 elite colleges and universities.” This study reviewed the party registrations of tenured or tenure-track faculty members at 32 elite colleges and universities. They include the entire Ivy League, premier liberal arts colleges and well-known technically oriented universities. They limited the faculty to those in economics, English, history, philosophy, political science and sociology.

The authors matched faculty members’ names to voting lists in the county and state in which the college is located. They admit that the results are suspect because many faculty members could not be found, and in some cases, there was more than one

individual with the same name. They found matches for 1,531 cases and could not match 2,724 cases. That is about a 33 percent success rate.

### **Conclusions**

The problem as the authors see it is that colleges and universities have fallen into the hands of a self-perpetuating political and cultural community that excludes conservatives. The authors go beyond the data they have collected to suggest that conservative values and ideas are not welcome on campus, and that conservative students hide their beliefs to protect their academic standing. The report suggests, again without direct support from the data collected, that the academic system produces intellectual conformity. They argue that administrators do not care about diversity of ideas on the campus.

The authors qualify their results as indicators of a problem, but make no claim to have definitively identified the problem. The results showed a predominance of Democratic voters among the college and university faculty and administrators. The authors report a ratio of 10 Democrats to one Republican.

### **Evaluation**

*Study replication*—The study does not provide sufficient information to replicate the research. We do not know what list of faculty was used to identify cases for inclusion and which types of faculty members it included (part-time, adjunct). The steps used to match names against voter lists is straightforward and could be replicated.

*Clear and specific definitions*—With the exceptions noted above, the definitions used in the study are clear.

*Ruling out alternatives/Relationship between evidence and conclusions*—The research fails to eliminate alternative explanations. The basic problem is deciding what evidence proves or disproves the hypothesis that conservative voices are stifled and that conservatives are systematically kept out of academia. The authors make the leap of logic that one's party affiliation can "... reasonably be said to reflect a predictable spectrum of assumptions, views and values that affect the outlooks of Americans who finance, attend, administer and teach at these educational institutions." This proposition is at the heart of debate, but it is not addressed by this research. The results suggest the possibility that Democrats outnumber Republicans in some departments at some colleges and universities. Even the magnitude of that difference is called into doubt by the low response rate.

The alternative explanation to the observed underrepresentation of Republicans is that they may not be attracted by an academic career. This study, as is the case with the other studies being reviewed here, presents no evidence that large numbers of aspiring young conservative intellectuals are being denied slots in graduate schools, or that conservative Ph.D.s are being turned down for teaching positions or denied tenure and promotion. Evidence of such consistent discrimination would be more compelling

than the simple frequency counts, buttressed by an example of some cases that exemplify the conclusion.

The authors provide anecdotal evidence to bolster their case. Individual stories can be chosen to support any conclusion. It would be easy to choose cases that make the opposite point—that American higher education boasts a strong cadre of conservative academic voices who greatly contribute to the vibrant diversity of American higher education.

*Eliminating bias*—The major weakness of the research is its sampling problem. The authors recognize this, and indicate that their results are “indicators of a problem.” They understand that the faculty members might be registered to vote outside the county or even the state in which their college is located. Of the 4,255 faculty members they tried to classify by party registration, only 36 percent could be classified as Democrat or Republican; the rest were either not found or could not be classified. The fact that nearly two-thirds of the cases could not be classified reduces the usefulness of the results.

The list of institutions included only two public universities, with the remainder being private. One of the major values of private colleges and universities in America is that they can choose to provide an education with a specific point of view, whether that view is liberal or conservative in character. The results tell us nothing about the faculty teaching in public institutions, especially those at community colleges and regional public universities.

The authors provide us with no information about how they determined that the name on the voter registration list was the same person as the faculty member. In many instances, only a handful of cases could be matched in an institution. This introduces the problem of imprecision of estimates and potential bias of results.

The lack of precision in this study and the leaps of logic from imperfect data to broad conclusions undermine its value. It would help the authors’ purposes to design a study that actually gathered data relevant to their concerns, rather than jump to conclusions from the limited data on party registration that they have collected.

**STUDY 7:** Kelly-Woessner, A., & Woessner, M. (2006). “My Professor Is a Partisan Hack: How Professors’ Political Views Affect Student Course Evaluation.” *PS: Political Science & Politics*.

### Summary

In this study, the authors related student perceptions of their political science teachers’ political and ideological views with the student evaluation of the teacher and the class. Theory led the authors to believe that if students perceived a difference between their



own political and ideological views and those of the professor, they would be less satisfied with the teacher and the class.

### **Methodology**

To test this proposition, the authors designed an instrument that asked students to report their perceptions of the teacher's ideological and political views, indicate their own views, and provide an evaluation of the teacher and the class. The instrument was tested, and then put in the field in spring 2005. The authors contacted 200 political science instructors from the membership of the American Political Science Association, of whom 27 agreed to participate. Along with the pretest instructors, there were 30 faculty members in the study, representing 29 colleges. These teachers returned 1,385 surveys that were completed by undergraduates toward the end of the spring 2005 semester. Half the participating colleges were private.

The instrument was developed using common measures of classroom experience. The authors include a copy of the data collection instrument, which asked students to rate each item on a five-point scale. A score of 2.5 would be neutral.

### **Conclusions**

The students rated 23 instructors as liberal and seven as conservative. The authors claim that the ratings of the faculty member's political party were consistent with the ideology ratings, but they do not tell us what those ratings were. The rest of the report uses correlations between the evaluation of the class and teacher and the student perception of the faculty member's ideological and political views. Correlations can vary between zero, which means there is no relationship between changes in two events, and either one or minus one, which means there is either a perfect negative or positive relationship between the two.

The highest reported relationship was between the instructor rating and partisan extremity, which was -0.124. This suggests that students gave lower ratings to instructors who they thought were strong Democrats or Republicans. All of the class assessment scores (increased interest, recommend to others, course rating and instructor rating were the items in this sequence) supported this relationship. A 0.088 correlation coefficient existed between the score on objective presentation and being conservative, and a correlation of 0.092 existed between the score on objective presentation by the instructor and being a Republican. Most of the additional significant relationships were between positive assessment of the teacher (encourages viewpoints, grades fairly, comfortable environment and cares about students) and the teacher being perceived as a Democrat.

The study goes on to investigate cases in which the students' self-stated liberal-conservative and Democrat-Republican rating differs from which they assign to the faculty member. The findings fell in the expected direction. There is a negative relationship between the overall assessment of the class and partisan difference. Again, the correlations are weak, ranging between -0.138 and -0.107 on this measure. The relationship between partisan difference and rating of faculty characteristics was even

weaker, with only three of the measures reaching significance (objective presentation, comfortable environment and cares about students). In general, the greater the perceived partisan difference, the lower the overall evaluation the student gives the teacher.

The authors note that these correlations are weak. Student assessments of the class and the instructor are largely accounted for by factors that are not included in this study.

Faculty members who were perceived to be in the middle of the partisanship distribution received higher student evaluation scores for their performance than did those at either extreme of the Democrat-Republican distribution. It may be that students are less comfortable with extreme points of view from faculty, regardless of whether those views are Republican or Democrat.

The authors conclude that political science teachers who teach in a way that communicates political neutrality will receive better evaluations than those who are perceived as being politically extreme.

### **Evaluation**

*Study replication/Clear and specific definitions*—The authors provide the information necessary to replicate the project. They have defined the variables and procedures used in the study.

*Ruling out alternatives*—The research does not preclude alternative explanations. This study does not provide evidence that students feel alienated by faculty members whom they see as predominantly liberal and Democrat. Students who see themselves as being ideologically different from a faculty member do give lower ratings to those faculty members. On a five-point scale, students who believe there is no difference between the party affiliation of the teacher and themselves gave a 4.4 rating, compared with a 4.04 rating from those students who perceived a difference. We assume that a 4.04 rating on a 5-point scale is still positive, so it is hard to read the difference as an indication of a major problem.

*Relationship between evidence and conclusions*—The conclusions do not always follow logically from the data. Students rate perceived liberal faculty members higher on items that measure care about students, allowing diversity of viewpoints, providing a comfortable environment and caring about students. This finding is not consistent with the charge made in other publications reviewed here that liberal faculty members do not provide a comfortable environment. Faculty members perceived as Republicans were seen as more objective by their students.

The data collection could have included items that might improve prediction. For example, the grade the student is receiving and whether the student is a political science major or a general education student could be relevant. Factors such as perceptions of the teacher's communication skills, organization and preparation for

class may all be more important than perceived political orientation in student evaluations of a teacher or a class. Adding more dimensions to the instrument might change the results attributed to political orientation, which are weak at best. A richer data source would allow analysts to control for these other factors to determine the independent contribution of the perceived political and ideological views of the professor to the assessment of the faculty members and the class.

*Eliminating bias*—The low response rates suggest the possibility of bias. In addition, we do not know enough about the sample of teachers to know what political perspectives or institutional types they represent. We assume that professional association members are less likely to be community college teachers or part-time teachers, but this is speculation on our part.

STUDY 8: Balch, Stephen, H. *Words To Live By: How Diversity Trumps Freedom on Academic Websites*. National Association of Scholars, June 29, 2006

### **Summary**

The author believes that “traditional conceptions of a unified American nationality, based on shared beliefs in liberty and individualism, have been replaced in our universities by a corporatist vision emphasizing a mosaic of distinct ethnic and gender groups, whose disparate values and folkways merit equal recognition and acceptance.” One of the indicators of this preoccupation is the reference to “diversity” on university Web sites.

### **Methods**

The author used Google to search Web sites for the frequency of the following terms: diversity, freedom, liberty, democracy and equality. He calculated the ratio of these terms and compared them with the results of searches on religious, media, political and business Web sites to gauge the philosophical distance between academia and these other institutional sectors.

The school Web sites were those of the Top 100 schools from *U.S. News & World Report's America's Best Colleges* 2006 list. The author used the results of the search to compare the institutional Web sites to the Web sites of major magazines and newspapers, major mainstream churches and synagogues, and major business associations and unions. The author provides detailed tables for each of the sectors reviewed and lists the Web sites visited in the study. An appendix provides the details and limitations of the Web search.

### **Conclusions**

The author found that the number of references to diversity on the college Web sites exceeded the references to classic watchwords such as freedom, liberty, equality and democracy. In all other sectors, “freedom” was the most frequently used term.

The author concludes that higher education is substantially more preoccupied with "diversity" than is any other sector of American opinion leadership, although churches and businesses also scored high. The author is concerned that diversity will undermine the ideal of an individualistic society.

### **Evaluation**

*Study replication/Clear and specific definitions*—The project could be replicated and the terms are clearly defined. This study differs from the others being reviewed, in that it uses content analysis as a method of data collection. The author provides all the information necessary to replicate the study.

*Ruling out alternatives/Relationship between evidence and conclusions*—The research neither supports the conclusions nor eliminates alternative explanations. The lack of careful methodology results in a study that does not support the conclusions. There are several problems with analyzing Web sites by using content analysis techniques that have been developed to assess print media. First, many different Web pages at a given institution will often point back to one common page. For example, the University of California, Berkeley offers a diversity grant for students enrolling in graduate programs. Many different pages include references to this program, which results in multiple word counts.

Second, there is no control for context. The term "diversity" is general enough so that some of the references have nothing to do with the political implications about which the author is concerned. The author recognizes this limitation, but believes the magnitude of difference is so great that it does not matter. For example, the UC Berkeley Web site includes references to biological diversity, ethnic diversity in Kenya, epistemological diversity, loss of diversity in plants on Point Reyes after a fire, and diversity of artistic interests, among others. On the other side, many references to liberty have nothing to do with the philosophical concept. The Berkeley search turns up references to Liberty Mutual Insurance Company; Liberty, New York; Liberty, Florida; the Statue of Liberty; Liberty Café in Spokane, Wash.; Liberty Ship Memorial; and the Liberty Media Group. All of these would count as ideological preferences in the frequency count of terms used for this study.

The comparison of the ratio of these terms with Web sites in other sectors is meant to suggest that universities are overly concerned with diversity. This approach ignores the likelihood that comparing the Web sites of different types of organizations and finding different types of content may be a function of the organizations' mission and purpose, not a different set of values. The problem is compounded by the lack of control for multiple references to the same event or program on the Web site and the fact that no consideration is given to non-germane uses of the words. This further reduces the validity of the results. The problems with this study reduce its usefulness as a measure of the prevalence of values within different classes of organizations. As it stands, it does not preclude alternative explanations for the results.

*Eliminating bias*—There is a possibility of bias in the results. We see this study as a preliminary effort to validate a research approach. For this reason, sample size and selection of institutions do not necessarily represent a proper sample. In our estimation, this effort has not succeeded, and the method does not show much promise that further efforts will provide better results. The inherent complexity of Web sites and the contextual uncertainty of words render the results implausible.

## Conclusions and Implications

**AS FLAWED AS IT IS**, research gains credibility as it migrates to broader audiences. For example, several secondary reports have reprised the basic research summarized here to strengthen their conclusions. Conservative pundits have used this material for editorials and commentary (*Washington Times*, March 30 and April 4, 2005).

The authors of the studies cited here have a clear agenda—to assert that the personal social and political values of college faculty members are reflected in their professional work on the campus. However, the research methods employed in these studies are not well-suited to make their case. The most significant flaw is the link between the empirical results and their conclusions. The danger of these publications is the potential migration of unsupported conclusions into facts in the general press.

Taken together, these studies at best are able to suggest that college faculty members are probably more likely to be Democrats than Republicans. Even this conclusion has to be questioned because vast sections of the higher education community are not included in their samples. They do not include community college teachers, or even faculty in less-prestigious institutions. We know nothing about part-time faculty, who were apparently not included. Given the low response rate, inadequate sampling and missing responses, it is not possible to calculate a ratio of Democrats to Republicans at the sampled institutions with any precision, much less imply what might be the case for faculty members outside the sampling frame. The different studies reviewed here do not agree in their estimates of Democratic dominance among the faculty, which range from 50 percent to 91 percent.

Starting with this shaky empirical data, the authors imply that the dominance of Democrats on the faculty narrows the theoretical perspectives available to students, excludes or marginalizes conservative voices on the faculty, and penalizes students who do not agree with the political beliefs of the teacher. None of the data or analysis provided allows one to make these conclusions. None of the studies reviewed here indicates how the supposed liberal bias affects the hiring process or promotion opportunities. The two studies that investigated students' perceptions of their teachers did not support the proposition that liberal teachers make students uncomfortable in their classes. This may be because the hypothesis is false or because the authors' research was so poorly designed that they could not exclude alternative explanations.

One of the values of bad research is that it can attract better research. These studies open up the question of how the personal beliefs and values of faculty members affect the content of higher education. The evolution of inquiry from simple suggestive investigations is called for in this case. Trying to design a study to investigate the subtle relationship between personal beliefs and classroom, departmental and institutional operations across disciplines and types of colleges and universities is beyond the simple collection of data from institutional Web sites or faculty members' political registration.

Suggesting that the higher education establishment actively excludes conservative scholars overlooks the possibility that people with different values and interests sort themselves into different professions. An illustration of the relationship between political values and occupation is evident in the predominance of Republicans in the military. A survey of active members of the military found that 57 percent indicated they were Republicans, compared with 13 percent who said they were Democrats (Blumenthal, 2006). A more complete review of the reasons for the Republican domination of the military is found in a report done for the National War College in 2000 by Colonel Lance Betros. Given the American tradition of a politically neutral military, this is a worrisome finding.

The important point is that the nature of military or academic occupations may each attract individuals who share common beliefs. It is no more plausible to believe that the hiring process for the military tries to screen out Democrats or retard their promotion than to believe that higher education discriminates against Republicans. Similarly, there is no more reason to believe that professional military judgments reflect partisan beliefs than to believe that faculty members' personal political beliefs influence their professional work.

Until credible studies are conducted to provide a more grounded and systematic approach to understanding the subtle relationship between political beliefs and professional responsibilities, it is irresponsible to suggest that the conclusions reached in these reports represent a scientifically derived set of facts. They do not. Passing off personal opinions as facts is not science; it is the antithesis of what serious researchers try to do, regardless of whether they are conservative or liberal.

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